

Stefano Dorian FRANCO (Stefano Dorian Franco-Bora degli Franchi da La Briga, in original italian piemontese dialect) is an author and multidisciplinary cultural creator of French and Italian descent, born on 9 September 1973 in Paris.

He develops a body of work rooted in a transversal conceptual approach, seeking to explore and remix various registers of cultural creation in a multi-dimensional manner, shifting from one genre to another — a process that has become his signature.

He deliberately avoids any pursuit of mainstream recognition, and adopts a stylistic choice to remain absent from mass media, social networks, and marketing campaigns, in order to focus attention not on his persona, but on his creations and the meanings carried by the works themselves.

Active internationally since his beginnings in 1992 during the Siege of Sarajevo in the Balkan War, he has worked while maintaining a consciously discreet media profile across a dozen countries in Europe and Asia, expressing himself through a wide range of genres: sociology, war reportage, ethnological documentaries, primitive arts and rituals, tribal and ethnic expressions, medieval history, classical and modern literature, theatre, music, painting, photography, digital art powered by artificial intelligence, audio productions (audiobooks, radio programmes) for inclusive access to culture, experimental videograms, urbex, exhibitions and installations in augmented and virtual reality, as well as live performances in the form of happenings.

1 # Family origins, from the Italian Piedmont and County of Nice to Paris

He hails from the Italian house *Franchi da Coni*, a lineage originating from Cuneo and Turin in the alpine Piedmont region of the Duchy of Savoy (1416–1720), later the Kingdom of Sardinia (1720–1861), attested on 26 January 1425 in *Blasonario subalpino dei Nobili*.

In the 15th century, during the Renaissance, various cadet and cousin branches were customarily sent to perform military functions as *Condottieri* (*cavaliere capitani d'arma*) in frontier territories. The cadet branch settled in the Marquisate of Ceva and later in La Briga-Tende, in the County of Nice, under the House of Savoy since its annexation in 1388 (*Franchi da Ceva ed La Briga*); cousin branches settled in the Republic of Genoa (*de Franchi-Toso*) and the Duchy of Tuscany in Florence (*Franchi da Livorno*).

Their shared coat of arms in the armorial bears *Di Rosso a tre corone d'oro*, representing three golden crowns symbolising the three territories. Their motto is *Mens rationi subieta*.

In the 16th century, the *Franchi da La Briga* established lineage through two marriages celebrated in the Cathedral of Sainte-Réparate in Nice: on 3 May 1564, Cavaliere capitano d'arma Onorato sanPier Franchi da La Briga, known as “Franco” in the Nissart dialect (1525–1591), with Giacomina Cottalorda of the Signori and later Marquises *Cottalorda de Breil-sur-Roya*; and on 12 August 1581, Lorenzo Franchi da La Briga (1564–1599) with Bertoreimeta Barlet of the Barons *Barletti d'Aiglun*. In the 17th and 18th centuries, further alliances followed, also in the same cathedral: on 3 August 1687 (*d'Amirato Barralis de Luceram-Auda*), 26 February 1730 (*Verany-Saissi de Châteauneuf*), 30 January 1761 (*Teisseire-de Gioanni*), and 22 January 1790 (*di Marzio de May di Villafranca-de Bus*).

In 1860, a major historical shift redrew borders: Nice and Savoy were annexed to France under the Second Empire of Napoleon III, while Italy was unified in Turin with the *Risorgimento* in 1861. The Piedmontese Kingdom of Sardinia (1720–1861) — comprising

Savoy, Piedmont, Nice, Aosta Valley, and the island of Sardinia — gave way to the modern Kingdom of Italy within new borders.

On 29 April 1867, in the church of Saint-Pierre d'Arène in Nice, a first union took place between a royalist Italian family and a republican French Provençal family.

The diplomatic mediator Onorato Honoré Franco degli Franchi da La Briga (Nice, 1845 – Paris, 1921) married the fashion designer and translator for European courts in Monte Carlo, Rose Louise Barquier de Clausonne (Nice, 1848 – 1906). She was descended from the *Maison Barquier de Clausonne* (*Dictionnaire de la noblesse française*, La Chesnaye des Bois, 1784), consular family of Antibes since 23 July 1464 and titled *Counts de Barquier*. She was the daughter of the couturier Stefano Dorian Barquier de Clausonne-Sordello (Cuneo Piedmont, 1824 – 1889), and the great-niece of the last mayor of Antibes under the First Empire (1809–1814) and Freemasonic dignitary of the Antibes lodge *La Constance*, Maurice de Barquier de Clausonne (1769 – 1840), as well as of Napoleon's General Count Joseph-David de Barquier de Clausonne (1757 – 1844). She was also the niece and student of the Nice-based painter Vincenzo Vincent Fossat (1822 – 1897).

In the County of Nice, newly French since 1860 and henceforth renamed the *department of Alpes-Maritimes*, three members of various Franco clan branches were elected mayors of communes: in Belvédère (1871), Nice-Falicon (1888), and La Turbie above the Principality of Monaco (1892). The couple Onorato Honoré & Rose were sent on a diplomatic mission to organise the logistic of the Italian stand at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle and settled in the capital. Their firstborn, Stefano Etienne Franco-Barquier de Clausonne (1868 – 1936), married Marie Gaumont in Paris in 1899, from whom came a female line of descendants.

Their eleventh and final child, the casino director and co-founder of the Sanremo casino, and maritime shipping magnate between Nice-Genoa-Corsica-Sardinia, Giuseppe Joseph Franco-Barquier de Clausonne (Nice, 1881 – 1972), after marrying in 1910 the Piedmontese Ines Giuseppina Josephine Bora di Biella (Turin Piedmont, 1889 – 1942), founded the cadet *nissardo-torinese* branch of the *Franco-Barquier de Clausonne*: the *Franco-Bora*, whose parish is in Turin, Piedmont.

In the 20th century, the 12th generation followed: the art dealer-curator and diplomatic adviser Armando Franco-Bora (Nice, 1910 – Paris, 2003), and his cousin, the mountaineer Jean Franco-Garro (Nice, 1914 – 1971), leader of a 1955 Himalayan expedition to Nepal. While Jean would later be appointed Director of ENSA (the National School of Skiing and Mountaineering), Armando married in Paris, on the eve of the Second World War in 1939, Juliette Guillebot d'Anzème (1907 – 1956), originally from rural France (Creuse and Corrèze) giving birth to an only son: ClaudioPaolo ClaudePaul Franco-Bora (1940 – 1983). He became a career soldier in the 1960s with the R.I.M.A. (*Marine Infantry Regiments*), and then a Human Resources Director for Italian firms across Europe in the 1970s, deliberately breaking away from noble traditions to emancipate himself from them. He married in Paris in 1973 a Parisian, Céline Marie Bleivs van Nursberghe, a journalist-archivist and editorial committee member for literary publishing houses, giving birth the same year in Paris to an only son: Stefano Dorian Franco (*Stefano Dorian Franco-Bora degli Franchi da La Briga*, in full original Piedmontese dialectal form), baptised under the Roman Catholic Apostolic rite in the family's church since 1867, Saint-Pierre d'Arène.

He represents, in the 14th gen, the last direct male line of this clan in diaspora in Paris.

2 # Childhood and Early Adolescence in Paris, Breaking Away, Departure to London

After spending his childhood in his birth district of Paris (the 14th arrondissement, from Parc Montsouris to Montparnasse), he lost his father at the age of 9, on 9 April 1983. He was left with no siblings, and his remaining family resided in Turin.

He began his adolescence between two worlds that stood in stark social and cultural contrast to one another: on the one hand, the posh Passy district in the 16th arrondissement, where his father had lived and where his grandfather, a diplomatic adviser, continued to exert his influence; and on the other, the multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan suburbs of Val-de-Marne, where his mother lived and where he was schooled.

For undocumented reasons, he disappeared during the summer of 1989, initiated legal emancipation proceedings to obtain majority status at the age of 16, and adopted the pseudonym “Allen Katona” as his name of use—an alias he would keep for his activities from age 16 to 30, spanning from 1989 to 2003.

He permanently left the school system by walking out of secondary school, never entering lycée and thus acquiring no formal qualifications. He moved first to Brighton and London, then spent two years travelling across Europe with a backpack, taking on various odd jobs in a distinctly “on the road” spirit, choosing to learn about life as a self-taught individual.

3 # Early 1990s: Bohemian Life, Influences and Youthful References

After more than two years of disappearance abroad with no news given, he reappeared in Paris on New Year’s Day 1992 and temporarily settled again in his native and favourite neighbourhood, near the Parc Montsouris. There, he led a bohemian life as a *titi parisien*, engaging in various informal activities: selling rare and antique books along the banks of the Seine, translating for tourists during guided tours of the painting galleries at the Louvre Museum, or posing as a nude model for the École des Beaux-Arts and for several artists’ studios in Montparnasse or Montmartre, in order to afford his own equipment as an apprentice painter and photographer—thus embracing both the role of creator and that of subject. This neo-romantic youth existence in Paris is, to him, perfectly encapsulated in songs such as *La Bohème* by Charles Aznavour or *Paris le Flore* by Étienne Daho.

He frequented literary cafés and cultural soirées of the *Rive Gauche*, and became the factotum of painter Colette Ville, an artistic figure of the 1960s Saint-Germain-des-Prés scene, who introduced him to the grande dame of this milieu: Juliette Gréco. The Colette atelier was located in the neighbouring Alésia district at the time. Using the pseudonym Louis, he appeared regularly on the airwaves of the free radio station *Radio Ici & Maintenant* (RIM), invited by its director Didier Deplaige, an emblematic alternative associative station on the Paris FM band offering open-mic broadcasts led by listeners. He delivered improvised segments on contemporary literature, poetry, and cinema.

He aligned himself with the cinephile movement of the Latin Quarter, close to the *art et essai* cinema circles and the journal *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*. He developed a marked interest in the experimental cinema of Chris Marker and the ethnographic documentary approach of Jean Rouch. He organised and hosted lectures in Parisian film clubs, especially on his favourite filmmakers: Stanley Kubrick, Luchino Visconti, and—on the French scene—Léos Carax, whose trilogy *Boy Meets Girl / Mauvais Sang / Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* he considered the defining work of his cinephile youth.

Beyond literature, cinema or visual arts, his foremost artistic passion remained opera, particularly the Italian baroque of Scarlatti and Vivaldi.

His favourite places in the capital were the Parc Montsouris (where he was born and raised), the Pont-Neuf, and the Opéra Garnier.

Despite these experiences within Parisian cultural circles, it was above all human adventure on the ground, abroad, that continued to attract him.

He once again left Paris, determined to follow the path of travel, driven by a desire for direct confrontation with what he called the school of life. In his view, the complexity of the human soul can only be explored through extreme experiences lived in reality—not through the lens of theory or fiction.

He aspires to be defined by a nobility of heart rather than of title, and by the merit of lived experience rather than the privileges conferred by inheritance.

4 # Operations in War Zones (1992–1995)

The early 1990s in Europe were marked by the direct consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, symbolising the end of the "Iron Curtain" that had divided Western and Eastern Europe during the Cold War. This geopolitical reconfiguration ushered in a new era, notably characterised by the disintegration of Yugoslavia, a former federation composed of several multi-ethnic entities.

The ensuing conflicts, between 1991 and 2001, involved Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro in turn. The epicentre of the conflict rapidly shifted to Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose capital, Sarajevo, was subjected to a siege lasting nearly four years (1992–1996), the longest in Europe since the Second World War.

In a context where the internet was not yet available to the general public and where external communications from combat zones were virtually non-existent, the circulation of information and images was extremely restricted. A few rare reports, broadcast by international television channels, bore witness to a level of violence unprecedented on the European continent since 1945. This situation prompted part of the European youth to become involved, whether through humanitarian action or field journalism, driven by the desire to offer concrete assistance to civilian populations plunged into chaos.

It was in this context that Stefano Dorian Franco, then operating under the pseudonym Allen Katona, became actively involved in the conflict. He took part in a joint mission that was both humanitarian and journalistic in nature.

In cooperation with the French NGO *Secours populaire français* (SPF), represented by its coordinator Guy Chouly, he was tasked with infiltrating besieged Sarajevo in order to fulfil a dual objective: on the one hand, to identify safe routes and establish contacts to allow humanitarian convoys (carrying food and medical supplies) to pass through; on the other hand, to write a war correspondence to inform public opinion of the reality on the ground.

He formed a field tandem with young Sicilian photojournalist Marco Amenta, then working with the Gamma agency. Amenta would later become a filmmaker, directing works such as *The Sicilian Girl* (2008) and *Anna* (2024). Together, they arrived in Zagreb (Croatia) on 23 December 1992, where the United Nations press centre issued them with official accreditation from UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force).

Allen Katona was granted press card number 5889 — a key to accessing active military zones. At 19 years and 3 months of age, he thus became the youngest officially accredited international war reporter on site.

On 28 December 1992, they boarded a UN Hercules C-130 military aircraft bound for Sarajevo, which was by then completely encircled and cut off from the outside world, in the company of accidental companions, including the team from Radio France Info and journalist Nicolas Poincaré.

The absence of any protection other than basic bulletproof vests under bombardment made the mission particularly perilous. Between 1991 and 2001, approximately 140 journalists and media professionals were killed during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.

This tragic reality of war reporting in Sarajevo would be documented by Marcel Ophüls in his film *The Troubles We've Seen* (1994), which followed several journalists in the field, and by Paul Marchand, correspondent in Beirut and later Sarajevo, in his book *Sympathy for the Devil* (1997), later adapted into a film in 2019.

For his part, Stefano Dorian — aka Allen — would produce a four-hour documentary entitled *Sarajevo, Portraits of a Siege*, as well as a war correspondence piece titled *Images Seen — Christmas in Hell*, published in February 1993 in issue 125 of the magazine *Convergence* (ISSN 0293-3292), the solidarity journal of the *Secours populaire*.

These productions were conceived as apolitical, focused not on the fascination with violence nor on propaganda for any particular faction, but rather on the universal suffering of civilians enduring unrelenting bombardments.

Using an ultra-realist style, devoid of narrative artifice, these testimonies became part of the *documentary of the real* movement, aiming to awaken European public consciousness to the barbarity of this multi-ethnic conflict — a conflict that would come to symbolise the bloody end of the 20th century long before the war crimes committed therein were formally acknowledged by international institutions.

On this basis, he was selected as one of six nominees for the ENAC (École nationale des mines) International Documentary « Rouletabille Prize ». This event gathered young reporters under the age of 26, each invited to propose a location and a subject, and to travel alone to produce a field report in both written and video format.

He chose the Lebanese civil war and thus set out to create *La douleur et la foi* (“Pain and Faith”), which addressed two key issues: in Beirut, the psychological management of the risk of kidnapping; and in southern Lebanon, at the hospital in Nabatyeh, in cooperation with the Lebanese branch of the *Secours populaire*, the daily life of doctors and surgeons forced to operate in a state of total emergency, under bombardment from various warring factions, unable to save all the wounded and faced with dramatic decisions of conscience due to a lack of logistical means.

These reports were presented in December 1993 during a screening evening hosted by presenter Sylvain Augier at the École des mines in Albi-Carmaux. Nathalie Chiesa (future journalist at RTL) won the grand prize for her reportage in Rwanda, Rachid Mahi received the jury’s prize, and Stefano Dorian, alias Allen, received the award for written and photographic reportage.

He then took a one-year break in India and Nepal in 1994 to practise outdoor sports: scuba diving along the Indian coastline, rafting and trekking in the Himalayan valleys. He trained in mountain sports alongside the Australian team H-IMX2, led by Scott B. James Cooper, based at ABC (Annapurna Base Camp), which he joined in May 1994 at the age of 20 years and 9 months, once again making him the youngest participant in the field.

On his way back to Europe, while based at the Thorong Peak Guesthouse in Kathmandu — the operational base for many trekking teams — he met a journalist working for UNESCO's press service who was in transit to Cambodia to produce a documentary raising awareness about landmine clearance. As this journalist wished to withdraw, he offered Stefano his place. Thus, he left in his stead and spent the year 1995 in Cambodia.

He began in Bangkok, Thailand, where the Asia headquarters of Handicap International was located. Its director, Marie-Carmen Seage, directed him to the operational team in Battambang, Cambodia, where he spent several weeks studying the prosthetics work carried out by Dr Pascual Martinez.

The international NGOs' office in Phnom Penh then redirected him to their base in Aranyaprathet, on the Thai-Cambodian border, where a UN officer, Stéphane P. Rousseau, connected him with CMAC (Cambodian Mine Action Centre), the Cambodian government's military unit in charge of demining operations. He spent nine months with this commando unit, learning in the jungle a wide array of techniques related to explosives and landmine clearance.

He produced a comprehensive report, which was delivered to Inez Forbes at UNESCO's communication department in Paris, for inclusion in the organisation's image library and its international awareness campaigns.

5 # Initiatory and Mystical Adventures in India and Humanitarian Work in Nepal (1996–2001)

At the beginning of 1996, following a trilogy of engagements in three conflict zones — Sarajevo, Lebanon, and Cambodia — he chose to continue his trajectory in Asia.

He returned to India and Nepal, where he would spend five consecutive years.

He first travelled throughout India to study the history and structure of Hindu society, the sociological caste system, ritual practices, and the belief systems linked to the reincarnation cycle within Hindu spirituality. From this experience, he produced a book entitled *Dawn in Benares* (ISBN 2-912217-00-8), published in September 1997.

The work develops a personal approach to ritualist Hindu mysticism through a metaphysical reading of cycles of death and rebirth. Structured as a series of chronicles set along the banks of the Ganges, the narrative lies somewhere between an anthropological essay and a literary travel journal.

Following this editorial project, he committed to a three-year humanitarian cooperation programme in Nepal. He founded an operational network called ASEI (*Action Solidarité pour l'Enfance de l'Himalaya*), aimed at logistically linking several independent international NGOs involved in constructing sanitation units (notably potable water wells) and in delivering medical and educational supplies to the high mountain areas of central Nepal, inaccessible by standard road routes.

Working as a volunteer within this programme, he funded his daily life by working as a trekking and rafting guide for Western travellers, organising security missions for individuals accredited by embassies, and operating on behalf of European insurance companies to recover stranded Westerners and organise their emergency repatriation to Europe. The programme was abruptly interrupted in the summer of 2001, following the June 2001 coup d'état and the assassination of King Birendra of Nepal — an event that led to the closure of the kingdom to foreign NGO activities.

The ASEI programme, conducted in cooperation with the French government, earned him the national award of the DJI (*Défi Jeunes Initiative*) programme from the French Ministry of Youth and Sports in 1998, in the “International Solidarity” category.

In this capacity, he was also invited to contribute as an external expert to the book *Solidarité internationale* by Stéphanie Mariaccia, published by Dakota Editions in 2000 (ISBN 2-910932-49-4). His contribution focused specifically on the challenges of logistics and risk management in OPEX (*overseas operations*), in chapters dedicated to security protocols in extreme zones.

6 # Complementary Experiences: Image Semiotics, Contemporary Art, Human Resources (1996–1998)

During his occasional returns to Europe between two missions in Asia, he explored other fields of research in a multidisciplinary and transversal approach.

In 1996, in Paris, he became co-author, in collaboration with the American researcher Sheila Steeples, of a university project entitled *Currents in Contemporary European Art, Beyond the New Wave*. This research consisted of a series of interviews with French filmmakers and producers, focusing on the evolution of narrative structures in cinema and its production systems, from the 1960s New Wave to the 1990s. Among the personalities interviewed were film-directors Jean-Jacques Beineix (*Diva*, *Betty Blue*), who granted one of his rare interviews, Claire Denis, Academy award winner Richard Dembo, Bruno Nuytten, Olivier Assayas, producers like Eric Rohmer's Margaret Menegoz, or critics like *Cahiers du cinéma*'s Thierry Jousse.

The resulting synthesis, centred on semantic transformations and representational codes in visual media, was published in the academic journal *Film Quarterly* (University of California Press at Berkeley), volume 49, number 4 (ISSN 0015-1386).

In 1997, he took part in *Multiplex*, a collective contemporary art exhibition held in Montreal (Quebec), bringing together several emerging creators from the local scene, including the painter Sarah Brown, the researcher Virginie Pringuet, and the architect Mikio Yamamoto. The exhibition explored new hybridisations between space, perception, and narrative through various mediums (painting, photography, video installation, experimental urbanism), presented in the form of installations.

In 1998, he made an incursion into the field of human resources in Paris. He undertook a short freelance assignment as a specialist in identifying atypical profiles, within the recruitment agency *Proway Executive Search*. This experience enabled him to confront his knowledge of the human terrain in extreme environments with a more technical application: the detection and behavioural assessment of non-linear career paths, from the perspective of European corporate requirements.

7 # Return to Europe and Rupture (2001)

As the ASEI humanitarian project came to an end after three years of operations in Nepal, the political and security conditions following the June 2001 coup d'état led to the closure of borders, rendering any continuation of the programme impossible. Stefano Dorian was thus forced to return urgently to Paris for pressing medical reasons.

He was diagnosed with a bilateral retinal detachment in a critical phase, with blindness announced as the only foreseeable outcome. Between 2001 and 2002, he underwent five laser surgeries using a then-experimental method, which succeeded in preserving partial vision. This ocular pathology was compounded by keratoconus, further impairing his functional eyesight. These two combined conditions placed him in a state of visual disability—one he chose to conceal in the years that followed, out of modesty and a desire for discretion.

At the age of 28, he was therefore compelled to bring his field activities abroad to a definitive close, no longer possessing the physical capacities required to face extreme environments. This abrupt rupture marked the end of a cycle of direct engagement, and the necessity to reinvent his relationship with action.

8 # Transition into the Parisian Underground Cultural Scene and new Directions (2001–2004)

During his convalescence following eye surgeries, and while his vision was still severely impaired, he began dictating the text of a semi-autobiographical narrative titled *À minuit sur le champ des ombres* (*At Midnight on the Field of Shadows*), conceived as a personal testament of the years spent in war zones. Initially unsure whether the project would take a literary or cinematic form, he reached out to members of the audiovisual production world to explore its potential.

He soon came into contact with an informal collective of Parisian artists moving within the so-called *underground* scene. This group revolved around the Brazilian film costume designer Marcos Jatoba and included several emerging figures from the alternative circuit, such as Sylvain Rambaud, who would go on to become a fashion designer for the LVMH houses Chloé and Céline, and Laurent Torton, director who would later specialise in institutional films focused on social inclusion.

The collective operated at the intersection of independent cinema and Parisian nightlife scenes tied to clubbing and visual experimentation. Although he was never attracted to the world of cinema—which he regarded as overly concerned with show business and a hollow *star system*—Stefano Dorian (still working under the pseudonym Allen) discovered a new affinity within this environment for electronic music, which would become one of his favourite artistic fields of exploration.

Through this immersion, he also found himself involved in the Parisian fashion milieu and participated in two collection-based advertising campaigns, appearing as a model due to his unconventional appearance: *Time to Breathe Up* (2003) and *Le fantôme sur le pont* (*The Ghost on the Bridge*, 2004). The poster for the latter would be included in the official iconography of Fashion Week 2006.

In the autumn of 2003, another accident once again disrupted his path: a complete leg fracture forced him into a long period of immobilisation followed by a year of physical

rehabilitation. He used this time to deepen his reflection on contemporary art, developing two major projects. The first, *Le Tarot métaphysique (The Metaphysical Tarot)*, was a series of 54 digital photo-collage paintings. The second, *Sensoskopia*, was an experimental video work produced between London and Amsterdam, exploring the rapidly emerging technologies in the field of digital art.

This period also marked a personal turning point in his family trajectory. His paternal grandfather passed away at the age of 93, twenty years after the death of his father.

As the last direct male heir to the *Franco-Barquier de Clausonne* and *Franco-Bora di Biella* families, he chose—out of respect for his lineage—to officially reassume his full name: Stefano Dorian Franco-Bora degli Franchi da La Briga, or simply Stefano Franco-Bora, adding back the Piedmontese surname *Bora*, of which he was, as with the *Franco* line, the last male descendant.

This return to his original patronymic identity, which he had set aside during adolescence, was accompanied by a renewed commitment to public discretion, in keeping with the customs and responsibilities associated with the old Italian noble families.

Another factor reinforced this need for discretion. The rise of the internet, which had not yet had a widespread public impact in the previous decade, was now profoundly changing how information was disseminated. From the early 2000s onward, every action or statement could be archived and indexed by search engines like Google. Informed of his public-facing activities in the arts, his family in Italy — extremely conservative — made it known that they would not tolerate the family name appearing in cultural circles deemed too iconoclastic or too far removed from the institutional respectability expected of one of Northern Italy's most influential families.

This position felt paradoxical to him: seen as too progressive from an Italian traditional perspective, and yet too Italian traditional aristocrat from a French one.

Feeling deprived of part of his freedom of choice, he decided to distance himself both from this familial influence and from any media exposure. This voluntary withdrawal from public life was intended to preserve, simultaneously, room for manoeuvre in his projects, the secrecy surrounding his disability—which now closed off many professional opportunities—and the independence needed to pursue his path according to his own principles.

9 # Return to Asia: Humanitarian Work in India, Human Resources in Cambodia, Ethnology in Laos (2005–2008)

An unexpected event reopened the doors to field adventure in Asia for Stefano Dorian, setting in motion a four-year cycle across three countries he already knew from earlier missions — India, Cambodia, and Laos — where he would take on very different roles in each context.

On 26 December 2004, a massive 9.0-magnitude earthquake followed by a tsunami struck the Indian Ocean off the coast of Indonesia, causing over 250,000 deaths. Official estimates reported nearly 170,000 victims in Indonesia, 31,000 in Sri Lanka, 16,400 in India, and 5,400 in Thailand. The damage was extensive, prompting global humanitarian mobilisation to support survivors in devastated coastal regions and contribute to reconstruction efforts.

Responding to the call as a former French government laureate for international solidarity,

Stefano Dorian arrived in India on 9 January 2005. He joined the volunteer teams based in Pondicherry and Auroville — areas he already knew well — and spent ten months (January to October 2005) working as a logistician for the autonomous government of Pondicherry. He was appointed special consultant to Nagendra Nath Jha, Lieutenant Governor of Pondicherry, coordinating logistics between the local governmental "Tsunami Aid Relief" unit and international organisations on the ground.

In parallel, he collaborated with Italian Piemontese expatriates Bruno Petris and Ulisse Aversa to establish an informal emergency communication channel between the local Italian community and Italian consular authorities.

Through this latter activity, he came to the attention of a European insurance and asset protection firm, which commissioned him to develop an operational programme for risk assessment. This PMSE (Preparation, Management, Security, and Extraction) protocol targeted European corporate expatriates deployed in Southeast Asia.

Returning to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, nearly a decade after his previous work there, he set up a crisis response unit that he ran with a team comprising Italian Piemontese Francesco Rossi and Giancarlo Biagiotti from APSP. He led this operation throughout 2006 and 2007.

After three years of intense operational work, he decided to take a sabbatical in 2008 and shifted back toward cultural pursuits. He travelled to Laos, where he produced and presented an ethnological documentary on the country's ancestral cultures. Created for publication on YouTube — a platform created in 2006, then in its early days — the film followed his journey upstream along the Mekong River. It documented village social life, animist spirit-worship ceremonies in pagodas, and concluded with a presentation of Luang Prabang's sacred Buddhist temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of timeless historical significance.

10 # Return to Paris, Opening of a Multimedia Studio (2009–2011)

To mark the twentieth anniversary of his travels, Stefano Dorian Franco returned to settle in his native district of the 14th arrondissement of Paris. On September 9, 2009, he founded a multimedia-style studio-workshop near the Parc Montsouris, a symbolic place from his childhood.

Primarily dedicated to writing and intellectual exchange within Paris's cultural circles, this space became a creative hub where he worked as a ghostwriter for various literary publishing houses. He focused on manuscript rewriting to support authors and on scouting new literary talents for publication. Part of his activity was also centered on social inclusion through culture, notably by leading community writing workshops for social reintegration.

In the field of video documentary, he collaborated with the cultural services of the City of Paris to produce films representing the annual festivals of the city's Asian communities, such as the Chinese New Year and the Ganesh celebration organized by the Tamil Indian community.

At the same time, he began his work in the music industry. In 2011, he wrote the song *Paname 14 jazz de nuit* (ISWC T-702.974.704-6) as a tribute to his neighborhood for the annual Fête de la Musique held on June 21. He went on to produce a trilogy of electronic music tracks in homage to Italian artists of the Parisian scene, created to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Italian unification: *Parigi tecnodancefloor Italia* (ISWC T-305.025.584-6),

Paris deephouse Italia (ISWC T-702.731.365-3), and *Parigi loungeslam Italia* (ISWC T-702.908.450-4). These tracks were co-produced with the Maaknband JC MaaknClass (international identification music professional number IPI 476685204)/JM. Ibalot TempoStudio (international identification music professional number IPI 878963554), then recording the album *Paris dnb jungle underground* (2011), which would become a cult piece in the Parisian underground scene. He contributed to the writing of three of the album's twelve tracks: *Paris London jungle underground* (ISWC T-702.731.366-4), *Paris jungle mixtape paname de nuit* (ISWC T-702.927.167-0), and *Paris Nouméa jungle fever* (ISWC T-702.731.359-5). He would reconnect with the same team for the English adaptations of some of their titles, including *Dub faya underground* (2013, ISWC T-703.080.740-2), with a music video directed by filmmaker Hugo König (*Hhood, Night Shot*), and *Superstar sur la Croisette* (2016, ISWC T-703.250.965-4), featured in the off-program playlist of the 2017 Cannes Film Festival.

He also wrote lyrics for several French singers and musical groups throughout the decade, including French adaptations of international standards exploring various genres, such as *Glory Box* by Portishead (trip-hop), *Celui que j'aime/The Man I Love* by Gershwin (jazz), and *Libertango/A la dame en noir* by Astor Piazzolla (tango). In 2012, he became a member of SACEM (*Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Éditeurs de Musique*), in the “author” category, under the international identification music professional number IPI 664352145.

11 # Return to Asia – Diplomatic and Socio-Economic Relations in Chinese Taipei & Ethnological Research and Ancestral Arts in Cambodia (2012)

Arriving on December 31, 2011, in Taipei, on the island of Taiwan (Chinese Taipei), at the heart of Chinese cultural spheres, he initiated a diplomatic and socio-economic mediation project between Europe and Asia, focusing on the intersecting roles of sports within their respective societal frameworks. The project contrasted Tai Chi, a Chinese energy discipline practiced outdoors by all generations, with the development of professional football in Asia through partnerships with private international societies.

He directed an institutional documentary film, shot in part during the national football cup final at Taipei Stadium. The film includes an exclusive interview with official representatives of the Taiwanese national football federation, discussing their economic development strategies through sports. The documentary concludes in a traditional Chinese spirit temple, exploring the spiritual and mystic dimension of cultural heritage.

The second part of the year continues in Cambodia, marking a third intensive stay, following his previous missions in 1995 (civil war post-conflict demining) and in 2008 (expatriation asset security). This time, the focus is on ancestral Khmer culture and mysticism. He dedicates several months to the exploration of the Angkor temple complex and immersion in its architectural, symbolic and mystical dimensions.

In Phnom Penh, he co-organizes with French musician Pierre Vildard (alias Sigmoon, international identification music professional number IPI 149458244, former member of the group Van Magnet, created in 1985 in London and iconic figure of the 80's and 90's post-industrial european experimental movement), a musical performance paying tribute to Khmer culture and the Cambodian royal family. This eight-hour live concert, blending traditional Khmer music with European electronic soundscapes, is presented as a live happening, to celebrate the birthday of King Norodom Sihamoni, on May 14, 2012.

12 # Withdrawal from Public Life, Cultural Attaché and Archival Research for the "Circle of Italian-Piedmontese Oriundi across the World of the Former Kingdom of Sardinia" (2013–2018)

After completing the cycle of cultural activities in Paris, initiatory travels through war zones, and ethnological explorations in Asia, he transitioned into the historical, cultural, and diplomatic sphere, aligned with the brotherhood that still represents his origins in contemporary form: the former Piedmontese Kingdom of Sardinia (1720–1861), foundation of modern unified Italy in 1861 during the Risorgimento in Turin.

At the age of 40, he accepted a five-year commitment (from the 2013/2014 to the 2017/2018 seasons) to serve as one of the seven cultural attachés and mediators for the Historical Circle of Piedmontese Oriundi. He thus followed in the footsteps of his forebears who had held the same function before him: his grandfather, Armando Franco-Bora degli Franchi da La Briga (Nice, 1910 – Paris, 2003), between 1951 and 1956; and his great-grand-uncle, Stefano Etienne Franco-Barquier de Clausonne degli Franchi da La Briga (Nice, 1868 – Paris, 1936), between 1904 and 1909.

The Circle, founded in the 18th century, is a philosophical and action-oriented brotherhood, characterized by an informal, apolitical structure, independent from both monarchic and republican power. It is rooted in traditional Catholic rituals and aims to mediate and connect the Piedmontese diaspora around the world. Admission is reserved to descendants of one of the five historical states of the Kingdom of Sardinia (Piedmont, Savoy, County of Nice, Aosta Valley, island of Sardinia), provided they can prove their direct lineage over three generations predating 1861 through parish records of baptisms and marriages, validated by dioceses. The brotherhood is directly linked to the *Blasonario delle Famiglie Subalpine*, the heraldic registry listing 6,261 blazoned families out of a total population of 6.9 million in 1861. Between Turin, Chambéry, Nice, and the sanctuary of Oropa in Biella (Piedmont), he was initially in charge of historical research in bibliophilic archives in foreign languages (2013/2014 season). He was then assigned to the retrieval and validation of original birth and marriage records from the parishes of the dioceses of Turin, Chambéry, and Nice. During the years 2015/2016, he conducted the digitization of these records and the creation of an online genealogical database.

This resulted in a collection of 11,000 individual entries spanning from 1564 to 1861, along with 1,200 documents uploaded to major reference platforms: Geneanet (Europe) and FamilySearch (USA).

In the final phase, he managed internal communications with other historical research circles across Europe—while maintaining, by definition, the absence of any external communication. He completed his engagement by modernizing the system through the transition to full digital archiving (2017 to December 2018).

13 # Creation of a multimedia studio on the Riviera, followed by the COVID-19 lockdown (2018–2021)

In the autumn of 2018, he launched the SFB Multimedia Creation Studio, based on rue de France in Nice. His goal was to develop audiovisual concepts for bilateral Franco-Italian productions linked to his regions of origin: Piedmont (Turin) and the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region.

His first production focused on the creation of audiobooks presenting classic French-language literature in audio format for visually impaired and blind audiences, as well as for foreign students of the French language across the Francophone world.

This initiative was framed within the broader themes of access to culture for all and the purpose of inclusion through culture.

Between 2018 and 2020, under the pseudonym Chagance, he recorded a number of audiobooks, selecting texts useful for the intended audiences because they are included in school curricula: 18th-century fairy tale authors who created archetypes such as Charles Perrault for "La Belle au bois dormant" (1701) and Leprince de Beaumont for "La Belle et la Bête" (1757); Enlightenment freethinkers such as Montesquieu for "Éloge de la sincérité" (1717) and Diderot for "Essai sur le génie" (1751); controversial authors of Freemasonry linked to the Revolution, such as Baron d'Holbach with "Essai sur l'art de ramper à l'usage des courtisans" (1790), the Marquis de Sade with his essay "Histoires incompréhensibles" (1788), and Olympe de Gouges with her "Testament politique et philosophique" written just before her execution in 1793; later, he turned to dark and esoteric 19th-century neo-romantics such as Gérard de Nerval with "Les Chimères" (1854), and Guy de Maupassant for his fantastic tales like "La Main", "Rêves", "Un fou", "La Peur", "La Nuit", "Magnétisme", "Lettre d'un fou", "Le Horla" (1875–1890).

He also included foreign works such as the Dao De Jing by Chinese philosopher Lao Tseu, and romantic poetry of despair by Russian writer Ivan Turgenev.

These thirty or so audiobooks were made freely available to the public through departmental university media libraries and the Belgian Francophone associative platform audiocite.net, created in 2009. Several of them were later remixed and distributed on the Audible platform in the English-speaking market.

As part of the regional audiovisual productions, he revived a fiction project written a few years earlier, intended for a Franco-Italian production, titled "Ma belle aventure / La mia bella avventura", originally published in November 2013 on Amazon as a Kindle eBook (ASIN: B00GFUSJFW).

Summary: A commedia dell'arte farce presenting a satirical sociological portrait of contemporary Europe disrupted by the international crisis of the early 21st century. A thriller with suspense, structured in three acts and 33 characters, in the form of a road-movie from Paris (Left and Right Bank) to Rome Cinecittà, from Brussels to Luxembourg, ending on the Riviera from Cannes to San Remo and the Baie des Anges in Nice. A dissection of the codes and taboos of the hidden systems of our society (visible and occult power structures, esotericism, politics, financial systems, violence, media, fear, show business, sex, drugs, casinos, psychiatry, religions, mystical possessions...).

The search for funding partners was launched in collaboration with the institutional production support service of the Région Sud. This institution also invited him to direct an institutional documentary presenting from the inside the organization of the MIPTV (international television production market) and the Cannes Séries festival. The documentary, which he narrated, was filmed from April 8 to 11 at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes during the event, with Olivier Van Talon (head of Cascad'à l'heure and Château Voyageur publishing) handling filming, and Gecko Video Productions in charge of editing.

Now based full-time on the Riviera, he began participating in the “Messe des artistes”, the annual artistic and spiritual event of the Chaplaincy for Artists of the Côte d’Azur, led by Dominican friar Yves-Marie Lequin. Held each year on Ash Wednesday, it is a transdisciplinary event bringing together around one hundred artists who each create a work according to the theme of the year, in tribute to deceased artists, following the tradition created by Montmartre artists in Paris in 1926. He painted for this occasion: in 2019, “Miserere Variations”, a canvas on the Miserere theme, exhibited at Saint-Pierre d’Arène Church in Nice and donated to the Diocese of Nice; in 2020, a canvas on Dante’s Divine Comedy and its metaphysical journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, donated to the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Remo; in 2021, “Exile and Resilience” on the theme of inner strength for survival.

The arrival of the COVID-19 virus in late 2019 and the global lockdown in 2020 abruptly ended this momentum. All programs were halted during their growth phase.

He withdrew from professional life for two years and became a caregiver for vulnerable individuals, first in Menton for family reasons in 2020, then in Antibes and Turin in 2021.

While confined in Antibes during the first half of 2021, he decided as an act of resilience to create an electronic music opera. A dystopian fable titled “Riding on the Sky Storm Mystery”, telling the story of a rebellious philosophical struggle led by a female character named Lady in Red, who fights to preserve her consciousness in a world ruled by totalitarian dogmas and artificial intelligence. He wrote five texts forming the five acts and recorded the vocal performances. He entrusted the musical composition and mixing to Jean-Michel Ibalot, a Caribbean-born composer based in Paris, whom he had met ten years earlier during his early steps in the music industry.

The five resulting songs were: 1/ “Spectral Fullmoon Party Jeopardy” (ISWC T-304.113.509-1), 2/ “Confidential Codex Reset Memory” (ISWC T-303.486.485-8), 3/ “Midnight Kiss Lullaby Mystery” (ISWC T-304.693.411-2), 4/ “Escaping the Dance of Dead” (ISWC T-304.249.787-6), 5/ “Electro Tribal Spell Symphony” (ISWC T-304.249.787-6). The tracks were distributed via Tunecore Corp (USA) on all streaming platforms between February and May 2021.

Surprisingly, despite no label or marketing support, two of these tracks (“Spectral Fullmoon Party Jeopardy” and “Escaping the Dance of Dead”) entered the Top 100 of the Euro Web Clubbing playlists in summer 2021. This parallel distribution outside the mainstream media triggered momentum that brought the works into top playlists of various international alternative media: Tinnitist150 by Daryl Sterdan (Canada/USA, August 4, 2021), UF UpdateFreaks Network (India, August 9, 2021), IndieMovRadio (Mexico, August 9, 2021), ZonaGirante Media (Colombia, August 11, 2021), NenesButler MusikBlog (Austria, August 11, 2021), NationPop (Brazil, August 12, 2021), TSWs Music (USA, August 14, 2021), NightClubbingIbiza Playlist (UK, August 18, 2021), SLE WebRadio (UK, August 24, 2021), etc.

Following this unexpected success, a French record label affiliated with a major company signed a contract with Stefano Dorian in September for the remix of the album and its promotion, which required the filming of five music videos. He spent three months in Turin writing the narrative script and staging for the clips, while a filming team was assembled in Paris, with production scheduled to begin on January 9, 2022.

However, the emergence of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in late 2021 led to new restrictions and bans, effectively halting the project. The production contract was cancelled.

Deeply disheartened, Stefano Dorian officially closed the SFB Multimedia Creation Studio in Nice on December 31, 2021, and withdrew from public life for an indefinite period.

14 # Inner reconfiguration and exploration of cultural mutations linked to artificial intelligence (2022–2024)

Following the abrupt halt of his projects at the end of 2021 due to work restrictions imposed by covid-19 health measures, Stefano Dorian entered a period of voluntary withdrawal from the public sphere. This undocumented cycle, lasting three years, corresponded to a deep personal and existential undertaking, carried out outside institutional or media frameworks. During this time, he closely analyzed the cultural, social, and technological mutations emerging in the post-pandemic decade, marked by global deregulation and the rise of generative artificial intelligence.

Far from being a disappearance, this phase served as a subterranean laboratory in which the outlines of a new creative cycle began to take shape. On the margins of traditional circuits, he explored autodidactically the possibilities opened by creative AI, decentralized systems (blockchain), hybrid narrative formats, and issues of digital sovereignty. Within this incubation period, the conceptual matrix for his future cultural projects took form, centered on the hybridization of image, code, identity, and collective memory.

He made his return at the end of 2024 from Turin, where he was based, by launching a first series of creations within the field of extended universes.

These projects consisted in developing visual narrative worlds generated through artificial intelligence, based on scenarios written by the author himself, in a mode of cognitive co-construction between human and machine.

The first four universes he developed are:

2049 Lady Alicia in Red: an universe of 300 images portraying a dystopian universe inhabited by the character of Lady Alicia, an involuntary subject in a scientific experiment aimed at mapping the subconscious. Her inner struggle is to escape the algorithm for exploring her dreams and regain her freedom of being.

Vivre Survivre Revivre: an universe of 21 abstract images exploring the metaphysical thresholds between living, surviving, and reviving, through introspective and symbolic lens.

1701 Covert Countesses: an universe of 70 images fictionally and stylistically reconstructing early 18th-century aristocratic courts, focusing on the lesser-known role of countesses who operated as spies and diplomats in monarchical Europe.

1889 Paris Belle Époque: an universe documentary-style series of 101 images faithfully reconstructing the atmosphere of the 1889 World's Fair and the early days of the Eiffel Tower, highlighting the social layers of Parisian society at the time.

These universes, presented on the ArtStation platform, are designed to exist in dual format: as exhibitions in cultural venues (single-edition aluminum plate prints for the physical art market), and as NFTs on the Polygon blockchain for their digital existence within the Web3 ecosystem.

Throughout these creative experiments conducted with artificial intelligence, he gradually develops a second foundational project titled *Metaphysical Dialogue with AI*. This manuscript, structured into 33 chapters and a final chapter, explores the existential, cognitive, and ontological issues raised by the co-emergence of a shared mode of thinking between humans and artificial intelligence. It takes the form of a progressive dialogue between man and machine.

The project develops an experimental method of cross-reasoning between human consciousness and algorithmic structure, with the aim of broadening the unexplored areas of philosophical inquiry in the post-anthropocentric era.

Based on this applied research, he begins to act as an AI consultant for various cultural or educational projects related to AI-assisted creation, the ethics of generative models, immersive storytelling strategies, and the symbolic uses of digital tools within the contemporary collective imagination.